

5

*TOY EXERCISE FACILITY, DOLLS FOR USE WITH  
TOY EXERCISE FACILITY, AND CARRYING CASE*

This invention generally relates to playthings for children, and in particular, relates to dolls and toys for use with dolls that are typically suited for 10 elementary school aged children or younger. More particularly, the present invention is directed to an inventive miniature toy exercise facility or toy gymnasium, configured to also be a carrying case for the toy, and for use with dolls. The inventive model exercise facility is built onto a folding carrying case such that the child may play with the toy, and then when finished playing with the toy, the child may fold it up, including the dolls, into 15 the carrying case configuration for ease of storage and transportation. In the opened configuration, the invention is a miniature model of a circuit exercise facility. In one embodiment of the invention, the toy exercise facility includes several traditional circuit training exercise stations such as a treadmill, a stationary bicycle, and a barbell bench. In another preferred embodiment, the toy exercise facility and carrying case may be sized to 20 be compatible with different size dolls.

*BACKGROUND DESCRIPTION*

The exercise and overall physical fitness trend continues to grow within the United States. The proliferation and increase in the various types of exercise 25 facilities, including military type workouts, martial art type workouts, and other circuit training programs, remains as strong today as at any time in the past. Similarly, the desire to instill in children the benefits of exercise at an early age has also been recognized. Indeed, recent medical studies show that the percentage of children in the United States who are overweight is growing. One periodical has noted that the number

of overweight children in the United States has tripled within the past 40 years. Runner's World, *The Return of Fun*, by Jay Heinrichs, October 2003.

One way of developing the understanding that exercise should be fun and should be a life long component of everyone's daily routine, is to, at an early age, allow 5 children to play or pretend play with respect to an exercise facility and thereby develop a comfort level with exercise as part of a daily routine. The comfort and familiarity that a child learns from learning what occurs in a exercise facility may encourage the child to become more involved with exercise as something that is fun to do everyday. The need to instill this understanding of the need for life long exercise, and to develop a comfort of 10 daily exercise, is especially important for younger girls, who, in the past have often not been included in many sports or recreation activities.

While there are many toys for children to play with, including toys to be used with dolls, there is a lack of toys that allow children to pretend that they are at an exercise facility, or at a circuit training facility. Similarly, while there are dolls that have 15 exercise dress up items, and dolls to dress up for various recreational activities, there does not appear to be any toys that allow a child to pretend that the doll and the child are at the gym exercising. For example, U.S. Patent No. 4,571,207 issued to Henderson, et al., for an *Exercise Toy For Doll* provides a simulated exercise apparatus toy having a housing with a seat, handlebars, simulated pedals and a simulated control panel with a window. The Henderson, et al. patent is limited to a model stationary bicycle and does 20 not disclose an entire workout circuit.

Accordingly, there is a need for a toy or play device that allows children to pretend play at an exercise facility. Such a toy should be safe for children, yet be flexible 25 and creative enough to allow for many hours of pretend play. The toy should be easy to set-up and to close and store after play has finished. In a preferred object, the toy should be easily transported in a compact configuration and not have many loose parts that can become broken or lost.

*SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION*

In view of the shortcomings of the prior art, it is an object of the present invention to provide a toy exercise facility for children to play with and to pretend that their dolls are exercising at a circuit training facility. It is also an object of the present  
5 invention to have the toy exercise facility be reconfigurable into an essentially flat playing surface and into a self-contained and self-enclosed carrying case.

To achieve this and other objects, and in view of its purposes, the present invention provides a toy exercise facility comprising a carrying case having a top section, bottom section and four sides; said carrying case being openable such that the bottom  
10 section, four sides and top section lie flat when the carrying case is opened; and a plurality of toy replica circuit training stations attached to the carrying case bottom section, four sides and top section.

Another embodiment of the present invention provides a miniature circuit exercise room comprising a carrying case having a top section, bottom section and side  
15 sections; connecting means between the bottom section, side sections and top section such that the bottom, side and top sections may be configured to lie essentially flat, as well as being configurable into a carrying case; a handle attached to the carrying case; and a plurality of toy replica circuit training stations attached to the carrying case bottom section, four sides and top section.

20

These and other aspects of the present invention are set forth below with reference to the drawings and the detailed description of certain preferred embodiments. It is to be understood that both the foregoing general description and the following  
25 detailed description are exemplary, and are not intended to be or should be considered restrictive of the invention.

*BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS*

The invention is best understood from the following detailed description when read in connection with the accompanying drawings. It is emphasized that, according to common practice, the various features of the drawing are not to scale. On 5 the contrary, the dimensions of the various features are arbitrarily expanded or reduced for clarity. Included in the drawings are the following Figures:

- Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a preferred embodiment of the present inventive toy exercise facility in an open configuration, in a rectangular shape and showing the drawer for the inventive toy exercise dolls;
- 10 Fig. 2 is a perspective view of a preferred embodiment of the present inventive toy exercise facility in a closed configuration and having a rectangular shape;

Fig. 3 is a side perspective view of a preferred embodiment of the present inventive toy exercise facility in an open configuration showing several exercise stations;

- 15 Fig. 4 is another side view of a preferred embodiment of the present inventive toy exercise facility in an open configuration showing one attachment method for the exercise stations; and

Fig. 5 is another side view of a preferred embodiment of the present inventive toy exercise facility in an open configuration showing another attachment method for the exercise stations.

***DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS***

The present invention is directed to a toy exercise facility, or toy circuit training gymnasium that is also configurable into a carrying case for the toy and for any dolls that may be used with the toy. The inventive toy primarily is comprised of (1) 5 interconnecting base sections; (2) flexible connecting elements or hinges between certain of the plurality of the base sections; (3) replica miniature circuit training equipment attached to the plurality of the base sections; (4) one or more dolls proportionally sized to replica circuit training equipment; and (5) a handle for carrying the toy as a unitary case after the base sections are reconfigured into a closed or carrying case configuration.

10 In a preferred embodiment of the inventive toy, as illustrated in *Figs. 1* and *2*, a carrying case 10 is made up of several base sections, including a bottom section 12, a top section 13, and at least four side sections 11. Certain of the base sections are interconnected to allow rotational flexibility between the several sections. More specifically, the flexibility between the base sections permits the user to fold the sections 15 with respect to each other. By being able to fold the base sections with respect to each other, the user may open or reconfigure the case into a flat plane, for playing with, as shown in *Fig. 1*. Thereafter, upon finishing playing with the toy, the several base sections may be folded or closed into the shape of a carrying case as shown in *Fig. 2*. The interconnection between the base sections may be of a textile material or fabric such 20 as typical hook and loop pieces. Alternatively, the base sections that are interconnected, may be connected by a hinge mechanism 15, such as a simple piano hinge.

25 A series of latching clips 16 or hook and eye devices may be used to hold the base sections of the case 10 together in the closed configuration once the sections are folded into the carrying or closed configuration. Also, a handle 30 may be attached to the top section 13 or to a side section 11, to allow the child to easily carry the toy once it is in the closed configuration.

To increase the utility of the inventive carrying case, a separate drawer 14 may be used to fit within the closed carrying case, as shown in *Fig. 2*. The drawer 14

may have several separate compartments to hold the dolls 50 or the doll's exercise outfits, or other toy pieces.

While what is described and illustrated in the figures is in the shape of a box or rectangle, with a bit more manufacturing complexity, the carrying case 10 may be 5 made up of additional base sections such that when folded into the carrying case, or closed configuration, the shape may be a five-sided pentagon, or other shape including up to an eight-sided octagon.

In another preferred embodiment, as shown in *Fig. 3*, one or more of the 10 side sections 11, or the top section 13, may be configured to be a miniature replica of the wall sections for the exercise facility in the opened configuration. For this embodiment, the side sections 11 that are walls to the toy exercise facility, may be decorated with illustrations 18 or pictures 18 that are often found in gymnasium walls. Such illustrations could be work-out charts or exercise encouragement posters.

As shown in *Fig. 1*, and in the closer views of *Figs. 3 through 5*, a primary 15 aspect of the inventive toy are the replica miniature circuit exercise stations 20 which are attached to the base sections. These exercise stations 20 are miniature replicas of typical exercise stations found in an exercise facility, including, without limitation, treadmills, stationary bicycles; elliptical trainers; step stools; step benches; barbell benches; dumbbell stands; exercise or balance balls; and sit-up incline benches.

The placement of the replica exercise stations on the case folding sections, 20 as shown in *Fig. 1*, may be the same as in an actual exercise facility with the various stations space about the exercise room to allow for circuit training. With the case 10 unfolded and in the open or flat configuration, the child may thus play with the toy, pretending that the child's doll 50 are exercising and moving from exercise station to exercise station.

In another embodiment, the replica exercise stations 20 may be attachable 30 to the case sections 12, 11 by a removable means. For example, the exercise stations 20 may be attached to the case sections by a textile type hook 21 and loop 22 material as illustrated in *Fig. 4*. Alternatively, if the base sections are manufactured from a metal product, the exercise stations 20 may be attachable to the case sections by magnets 23

that are formed in each of the exercise stations 20 as shown in *Fig. 5*. This allows the child to move the various exercise stations 20 to different places on the case sections. By being able to reconfigure the exercise stations 20, the child may pretend to make up new exercise routines or varied and different exercise facilities. The exercise stations 20 may 5 be manufactured from a pliable plastic material.

With slightly more intricacy, one or more of the exercise stations 20 may be manufactured to have certain moving parts. For example, the stationary bicycle station may have a wheel that is rotatable. Similarly, the elliptical trainer may have the arm levers and foot pedals that are movable. With this feature, the child's interest in the 10 toy and pretend play with the toy is enhanced.

Another primary aspect of a preferred embodiment of the present invention is having "exercise-type" music playing when the carrying case is in an opened configuration and the child is pretend playing with the toy. The music playing device 25 may be, in different preferred embodiments, a removable compact disc, or a removable 15 cassette tape. In another preferred embodiment, the music playing device may be a permanent computer programmed or computer generated sound track similar to that is often used in more sophisticated electronic dolls. In each of these embodiments, the music being played is meant to simulate the type of exercise high energy music that is played during a circuit training regimen to which the participants exercise. Typical high 20 energy music has approximately more than 100 beats per minute to encourage the participants to maintain a rigorous exercise level.

The doll 50 used with the carrying case 10 and exercise stations 20 should be proportionally sized to the miniature circuit training stations such that the child may readily pretend that the doll 50 is exercising at each exercise stations 20. For example, in 25 a preferred embodiment, the child can sit her doll on the stationary bicycle pretending that the doll is exercising at that station, or pretend the doll is exercising with the free weights, or is using any of the other training stations.

Although the invention has been described with reference to exemplary 30 embodiments, it is not limited to those specific embodiments. For example, while the

particular disclosure and illustration of the inventive toy shows a rectangular shaped carrying case, as noted, the case 10 can be configured with additional sides such that when folded, the case forms a five-sided or more than four-sided configuration. Accordingly, it is intended to be and should be understood that the following claims are 5 to be construed to include other variants and embodiments of the invention which may be made by those skilled in the art as being within the true spirit and scope of the present invention.